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FLOOR DEBATE

April 14, 2004      LB 1083

Police Department conducted just over 1,500 mental health investigations. Now think about that for a minute as a draw on police resources. We placed 758 mentally ill or dangerous persons, mentally ill and dangerous persons, in protective custody. We spent more time on these cases than we spent on injury accidents, more than we spent investigating felony assaults, more than we spent on burglaries. We have become the major provider of crisis services to the mentally ill, not by choice so much as by necessity. While people often hold up Lancaster County's Crisis Center as a model of the kind of community care LB 1083 seeks to provide more broadly throughout Nebraska, the fact of the matter is that two-thirds of the time we needed a placement for a person in emergency protective custody last year, two-thirds of the time the crisis center was already full. One of the major reasons it was full is because there are patients still in the crisis center who had been committed by the mental health board but there was no bed at the regional center. When we hear of a plan to close two regional centers, we become concerned that there may be an overall reduction in the number of secure inpatient beds for patients committed by mental health boards. We have repeatedly been assured that this is not...that this will not be the case and that, in fact, new resources will be cultivated to provide more beds for those in mental health crisis. We hope this proves to be the case. We have been told that the state will turn to hospitals, in part, to fill this need. Our own experience in this regard has not inspired confidence. Fewer Nebraska hospitals are providing psychiatric services these days, and psychiatric wards in hospitals are often not well-equipped to deal with the kinds of patients I am most concerned about--those who are dangerous to themselves or others and who are, due to their mental illness, exceptionally noncompliant...

SENATOR CUDABACK: One minute.

SENATOR BEUTLER: ...or abusive and violent. And by the way, thinking of some of the figures that crossed our desks earlier with regard to the costs of hospital inpatient care compared to regional center inpatient care, some of those figures, I recall, were twice and three times as much. Among...caring for the mentally ill and dangerous person is a difficult proposition.